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Learning the Qur'an After Conversion: Religious Motivation and Qur'anic Engagement among Muslim Converts in Rural Indonesia

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Abstract

Religious conversion in Islam extends beyond the formal declaration of faith and involves a continuous process of religious learning and spiritual adaptation. Among the various dimensions of post-conversion religious development, engagement with the Qur'an occupies a central role in strengthening faith and deepening religious understanding. This study aims to examine the religious motivations that encourage Muslim converts to learn the Qur'an and to explore their experiences of Qur'anic engagement in a rural Indonesian context. Employing a qualitative field research design, the study was conducted in Padang Raya Village, Seko District, North Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving Muslim converts residing in the village. The findings reveal that learning the Qur'an constitutes a significant aspect of the post-conversion journey of Muslim converts. Religious motivation was shaped by both external and internal factors, particularly family support, marital relationships, and personal spiritual aspirations. The study further demonstrates that engagement with the Qur'an extends beyond learning recitation skills and encompasses efforts to understand, internalize, and practice Islamic teachings in everyday life. Participants reported various spiritual benefits derived from Qur'anic learning, including emotional comfort, inner peace, strengthened faith, and increased religious commitment. Despite limited access to formal religious education in this geographically remote area, converts exhibited strong enthusiasm for participating in Qur'anic learning activities. This study contributes to the literature on conversion and Qur'anic engagement by highlighting the role of the Qur'an as a source of religious motivation, spiritual development, and faith sustainability among Muslim converts in rural Indonesia.

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Introduction

Religious conversion represents a profound transformation that involves changes in belief systems, social affiliations, personal identities, and religious practices. Scholars have long argued that conversion should not be understood merely as a momentary declaration of faith but rather as a continuing process of religious learning and adaptation through which converts gradually internalize the teachings, values, and worldview of their newly embraced religion (Rambo, 1993; Poston, 1992). In the context of Islam, the conversion process begins with the pronouncement of the *shahadah*, yet the journey toward becoming a committed Muslim extends far beyond this formal declaration. New converts are required to acquire religious knowledge, understand Islamic doctrines, learn ritual practices, and develop familiarity with the Qur'an as the primary source of Islamic guidance. Consequently, post-conversion religious learning constitutes a crucial dimension of Muslim converts' experiences and deserves greater scholarly attention.

The Qur'an occupies a central position in the spiritual and intellectual life of Muslims. Beyond functioning as a sacred scripture, the Qur'an serves as a source of guidance (*huda*), mercy (*rahmah*), healing (*shifa'*), and ethical direction for humanity (Abdel Haleem, 2010; Esack, 2005). The Qur'an repeatedly encourages believers to read, reflect upon, and implement its teachings in everyday life (Saeed, 2008). Within Islamic educational traditions, engagement with the Qur'an encompasses not only the ability to recite its verses but also efforts to understand its meanings, internalize its values, and apply its teachings in personal and social contexts (Nasr, 2015). Therefore, learning the Qur'an often becomes one of the most significant religious activities undertaken by individuals who have recently embraced Islam.

The importance of supporting new Muslims is explicitly acknowledged in Islamic teachings through the concept of *muallaf al-qulub*, a category mentioned in Qur'an 9:60. Classical exegetes such as al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir interpret this category as referring to individuals whose hearts are inclined toward Islam and who require support to strengthen their commitment to the faith (Al-Tabari, 2001; Ibn Kathir, 2003). Contemporary scholars further argue that assistance for converts should not be limited to material support but should also include educational, spiritual, and social guidance that enables them to develop a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings and sustain their religious commitment (Shavit, 2014; Zebiri, 2008). From this perspective, Qur'anic learning functions as an essential component of the broader process of nurturing faith among converts and facilitating their integration into Muslim communities.

Previous studies have examined Muslim converts from various perspectives. Research has explored conversion motives, psychological transformations, social adaptation, religious identity formation, and the effectiveness of religious guidance programs for converts (Köse, 1996; Sultan & Mohamed, 2023). In Indonesia, studies have highlighted the importance of Islamic education, mentoring, and community support in helping converts navigate the challenges associated with their new religious lives (Mahmud et al., 2019; Umin, 2019). Other scholars have investigated Qur'anic reception among converts, emphasizing how engagement with the Qur'an contributes to the construction of religious meanings and personal understandings of Islam (Fitriana & Muttaqin, 2020). These studies collectively demonstrate that post-conversion experiences are shaped by multiple religious, social, and cultural factors.

Despite these valuable contributions, existing scholarship has paid limited attention to the specific relationship between religious motivation and Qur'anic engagement among Muslim converts, particularly within rural contexts. Most studies focus on institutional guidance, conversion narratives, or psychological adaptation, while the lived experiences of converts in learning the Qur'an remain relatively underexplored. Furthermore, many studies are situated in urban environments or within organized conversion centers, leaving rural Muslim communities insufficiently represented in academic discussions. As a result, little is known about how converts living in geographically remote areas develop Qur'anic literacy, what motivates them to engage with the Qur'an, and how they interpret the role of the Qur'an in their religious lives.

This gap is particularly important in Indonesia, a country characterized by significant religious diversity and varying local experiences of conversion. Rural areas often present distinctive challenges and opportunities for religious learning due to limited educational infrastructure, restricted access to formal Islamic institutions, and reliance on family or community networks for religious instruction (Azra, 2015). In such settings, understanding how converts acquire religious knowledge and sustain their commitment to Islam becomes essential for developing more inclusive approaches to Islamic education and da'wah. Examining Qur'anic learning among converts in rural communities can therefore contribute to broader discussions concerning religious literacy, spiritual development, and community-based religious support in contemporary Muslim societies.

This study focuses on Muslim converts in Padang Raya Village, Seko District, North Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi. Located in a geographically remote area, this community presents a unique context for examining post-conversion religious learning. Field findings indicate that many converts embraced Islam through marriage, yet their engagement with the Qur'an extends beyond marital obligations. They demonstrate considerable enthusiasm for learning to read, understand, and practice Qur'anic teachings despite limited access to structured religious education. Their experiences reveal how personal motivation, family encouragement, and spiritual encounters with the Qur'an contribute to sustained religious learning after conversion. These dynamics provide an important opportunity to explore the role of the Qur'an in shaping the religious experiences of new Muslims within a rural Indonesian setting.

Accordingly, this article aims to examine the religious motivations that encourage Muslim converts to learn the Qur'an and to explore how they engage with the Qur'an in their everyday religious lives. By investigating the experiences of converts in Padang Raya Village, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on conversion, Qur'anic engagement, and Islamic education. More importantly, it offers empirical insights into the religious experiences of Muslim converts in rural Indonesia, a context that remains underrepresented in contemporary Islamic Studies literature.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a field research design to explore the experiences of Muslim converts in learning the Qur'an after embracing Islam. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' motivations, perceptions, and lived experiences regarding Qur'anic learning within their specific social and religious context. Rather than measuring variables

quantitatively, this approach enabled an in-depth exploration of how converts interpret and experience their engagement with the Qur'an in everyday life.

The research was conducted in Padang Raya Village, Seko District, North Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The village was selected because it represents a rural community with a significant number of Muslim converts living in a geographically remote area. In addition, the location provides a unique context for examining post-conversion religious learning, particularly in circumstances where access to formal Islamic educational institutions remains limited.

The participants consisted of Muslim converts (*muallaf*) residing in Padang Raya Village. Based on field data, fifteen converts were identified within the community, while several participants were purposively selected as key informants for in-depth interviews. The selection of informants was based on their willingness to participate, their experiences as converts, and their involvement in learning and practicing Qur'anic teachings. This purposive sampling strategy allowed the researcher to obtain rich and relevant information regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. First, observation was conducted to examine the social and religious environment of the converts, including their participation in religious activities and their interactions within the Muslim community. Second, semi-structured interviews were carried out with selected converts to explore their motivations for learning the Qur'an, their learning experiences, the challenges they encountered, and the meanings they attached to Qur'anic engagement after conversion. Third, documentation was used to complement the primary data through the examination of village records, demographic information, and other documents relevant to the study.

To ensure data credibility, the researcher employed source triangulation by comparing information obtained from different participants and data collection techniques. Information gathered through interviews was cross-checked with observational findings and available documentation to enhance the trustworthiness of the results.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of qualitative analysis consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, the researcher organized and selected information relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, the data were presented in a systematic narrative form to facilitate interpretation and thematic identification. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from participants' experiences. Through this process, the study generated a comprehensive understanding of the religious motivations and Qur'anic engagement of Muslim converts in Padang Raya Village.

This study also considered ethical principles in qualitative research. Participation was voluntary, and all informants were informed about the purpose of the research prior to the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and participants' statements were used solely for academic purposes.

Results

The Qur'anic Understanding of Muallaf

The study first examined the Qur'anic understanding of *muallaf* as perceived within the framework of Islamic teachings. Analysis of Qur'an 9:60 revealed that *muallaf al-qulub* refers to individuals whose hearts are inclined toward Islam and who require support to strengthen their commitment to the faith. In the context of Islamic jurisprudence, this category is recognized as one of the recipients of zakat, reflecting Islam's concern for the spiritual stability and religious development of new Muslims. The findings indicate that the concept of *muallaf* extends beyond formal conversion and includes the process of nurturing faith, religious understanding, and commitment to Islamic teachings.

Field data further showed that Muslim converts in Padang Raya Village generally viewed conversion as the beginning of a new religious journey rather than its final destination. Consequently, learning Islamic teachings, particularly the Qur'an, was perceived as an essential obligation for strengthening their understanding of Islam and maintaining religious consistency after conversion.

Motivations for Learning the Qur'an after Conversion

One of the most significant findings concerns the motivations that encouraged converts to learn the Qur'an. Interviews revealed that family support, especially from spouses, played a crucial role in initiating Qur'anic learning. Most converts entered Islam through marriage and subsequently received encouragement from their Muslim spouses to learn basic Islamic teachings, including Qur'anic recitation.

Several participants explained that their initial exposure to the Qur'an came directly from family members. Learning activities often began with recognizing Arabic letters, practicing recitation, and participating in informal religious gatherings. Over time, these activities developed into a personal desire to understand the Qur'an more deeply.

One participant explained that after embracing Islam, her enthusiasm for learning the Qur'an increased significantly because her husband actively encouraged and guided her in religious learning. She also expressed appreciation for Qur'anic learning activities specifically organized for converts, which strengthened her motivation to continue studying.

The findings therefore suggest that marital relationships functioned not only as a factor in religious conversion but also as an important source of religious encouragement and educational support during the post-conversion period.

Forms of Qur'anic Engagement among Muslim Converts

The study found that Qur'anic engagement among converts was manifested through various practices. The most common form involved learning to read and recite the Qur'an correctly. Participants consistently reported efforts to improve their recitation skills despite limited access to formal Islamic educational institutions.

Observation data further revealed that many converts demonstrated a respectful attitude toward the Qur'an. Before reading the Qur'an, they generally performed ablution (*wudu*) and prepared themselves spiritually. Such practices indicate that engagement with the Qur'an was not limited to literacy acquisition but also involved the development of religious etiquette and reverence toward the sacred text.

Beyond recitation, participants sought to understand the meanings and messages of Qur'anic verses. They perceived the Qur'an as a source of practical guidance capable of directing human behavior and providing solutions to everyday challenges. Several informants described the Qur'an as a guidebook for life, emphasizing its role in shaping moral conduct and strengthening faith. According to the participants, the Qur'an contains teachings that help Muslims distinguish right from wrong and navigate various personal and social situations.

These findings indicate that Qur'anic engagement among converts encompasses cognitive, spiritual, and practical dimensions. Learning the Qur'an was not merely an educational activity but also a process of integrating Islamic values into daily life.

Perceived Spiritual Benefits of Qur'anic Learning

A recurring theme in participants' narratives was the spiritual impact of learning and interacting with the Qur'an. Converts consistently reported experiencing feelings of peace, comfort, and emotional relief when reading or listening to Qur'anic recitation.

One informant explained that the Qur'an provided a calming effect during moments of anxiety, personal difficulties, or emotional distress. She contrasted the experience of reading the Qur'an with reading ordinary books, emphasizing that the Qur'an generated a unique sense of tranquility and reassurance.

Other participants described the Qur'an as a form of spiritual medicine capable of strengthening their faith and providing emotional stability. Through continuous interaction with the Qur'an, they felt increasingly confident in their religious commitment and more optimistic in facing life's challenges.

In addition, some participants associated Qur'anic learning with eschatological rewards. One convert expressed a belief that reading the Qur'an would bring intercession (*shafa'ah*) in the Hereafter, a conviction that motivated continued engagement with the sacred text. Such beliefs strengthened their determination to learn and practice Qur'anic teachings despite various limitations.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the benefits of Qur'anic learning among converts extend beyond religious knowledge acquisition. The Qur'an functions as a source of spiritual comfort, emotional resilience, moral guidance, and religious motivation that supports converts throughout their post-conversion journey.

Challenges and the Need for Religious Support

Although the participants demonstrated strong enthusiasm for learning the Qur'an, the study also identified several challenges. The rural and geographically remote setting limited access to structured Qur'anic education and regular religious mentoring. Many converts relied primarily on spouses, local religious figures, or visiting preachers for religious instruction.

Despite these limitations, participants consistently expressed positive attitudes toward Qur'anic learning programs and welcomed opportunities for religious guidance. Observation findings showed high levels of participation whenever Qur'anic learning activities or religious mentoring sessions were conducted in the village. Converts viewed such programs as valuable opportunities to improve their religious knowledge and strengthen their commitment to Islam.

These findings highlight the continuing need for accessible and sustainable religious education programs specifically designed to support Muslim converts in rural communities.

Discussion

Qur'anic Learning as a Continuation of the Conversion Process

The findings demonstrate that conversion to Islam should not be understood as a single event marked by the declaration of the *shahadah*, but rather as an ongoing process of religious learning and spiritual adaptation. This finding supports Rambo's (1993) theory of religious conversion, which conceptualizes conversion as a dynamic process involving commitment, learning, and continued religious development. In the present study, becoming Muslim represented the beginning of a new journey in which converts sought to understand and practice the teachings of Islam through engagement with the Qur'an.

The participants consistently viewed learning the Qur'an as an essential step in becoming a better Muslim. Their experiences indicate that Qur'anic learning serves as a bridge between formal conversion and practical religious commitment. Rather than being satisfied with merely adopting a new religious identity, the converts demonstrated a strong desire to acquire knowledge that would enable them to understand their faith more deeply. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that religious education constitutes one of the most important factors supporting the sustainability of conversion among new Muslims (Köse, 1996; Zebiri, 2008).

The significance of Qur'anic learning in this context is also consistent with the Islamic understanding of *muallaf al-qulub*. Classical Muslim scholars emphasize that converts require continuous spiritual support to strengthen their faith and prevent religious uncertainty. The enthusiasm shown by participants in learning the Qur'an illustrates how educational support functions as a practical realization of this Qur'anic principle. Consequently, Qur'anic learning should be viewed not merely as an educational activity but as an integral component of post-conversion religious formation.

Family Support and Religious Motivation in Post-Conversion Learning

A prominent finding of this study is the crucial role played by family members, particularly spouses, in motivating converts to learn the Qur'an. Most participants reported that their initial exposure to Qur'anic learning occurred through marital relationships and family interactions. This finding confirms the argument that conversion is often embedded within broader social relationships rather than being solely an individual experience (Poston, 1992).

The role of spouses extends beyond influencing the decision to convert. In the present study, spouses acted as informal religious mentors who introduced converts to Qur'anic recitation, encouraged participation in religious activities, and provided emotional support throughout the learning process. Such findings suggest that family environments function as important sites of religious socialization for new Muslims.

At the same time, the findings reveal that external encouragement gradually transformed into internal religious motivation. Although many participants initially learned the Qur'an because of encouragement from their spouses, continued engagement with the Qur'an generated personal interest and commitment. This transformation from external

motivation to internal religious conviction reflects a significant stage in the development of religious commitment. It indicates that effective support for converts should not only provide religious instruction but also create opportunities for meaningful personal encounters with Islamic teachings.

These findings are consistent with studies emphasizing the importance of social support networks in facilitating religious adaptation among converts. Family acceptance, religious guidance, and supportive social environments contribute significantly to the sustainability of religious commitment and the development of positive post-conversion experiences.

The Qur'an as a Source of Spiritual Meaning and Emotional Well-Being

Another important finding concerns the spiritual and psychological benefits experienced by participants through their engagement with the Qur'an. Many converts described feelings of peace, emotional comfort, and spiritual reassurance when reading or listening to Qur'anic recitation. Such experiences demonstrate that the Qur'an functions not only as a source of religious knowledge but also as a source of emotional and spiritual well-being.

This finding reflects the Qur'anic portrayal of itself as *shifa'* (healing) and *rahmah* (mercy) for believers. Participants frequently associated the Qur'an with emotional relief during periods of stress, anxiety, or personal difficulty. Their testimonies suggest that interaction with the Qur'an contributes to psychological resilience by providing a sense of meaning, hope, and divine guidance.

Previous studies on Qur'anic engagement similarly indicate that reading and reflecting upon the Qur'an can foster emotional stability, spiritual satisfaction, and stronger religious commitment (Saeed, 2008; Nasr, 2015). The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that such benefits are also experienced by new Muslims living in rural communities. Despite their relatively recent exposure to Islam, the participants developed strong emotional attachments to the Qur'an and perceived it as an indispensable source of guidance in their lives.

Furthermore, the belief that the Qur'an offers rewards in the Hereafter strengthened participants' motivation to continue learning. This indicates that Qur'anic engagement among converts is shaped by both immediate spiritual experiences and long-term religious aspirations. Consequently, the Qur'an serves multiple functions simultaneously: a source of knowledge, a guide for daily life, a means of spiritual healing, and a symbol of religious commitment.

Strengthening Qur'anic Education for Converts in Rural Muslim Communities

The findings also highlight the challenges faced by converts living in geographically remote areas. Limited access to formal religious institutions, Islamic educational programs, and qualified instructors often constrains opportunities for systematic Qur'anic learning. Under such circumstances, converts rely heavily on family members, local religious figures, and occasional religious outreach activities.

Nevertheless, the strong enthusiasm demonstrated by participants suggests that the primary obstacle is not a lack of motivation but rather limited educational opportunities. Whenever Qur'anic learning activities were organized, converts participated actively and

expressed appreciation for the guidance they received. This finding indicates a substantial demand for sustainable educational programs specifically designed for converts in rural areas.

From a practical perspective, these findings underline the importance of strengthening community-based approaches to convert education. Islamic organizations, local mosques, and religious outreach institutions should collaborate to provide accessible Qur'anic learning opportunities tailored to the needs of new Muslims. Such initiatives may include regular Qur'anic literacy classes, mentoring programs, and structured religious education designed to support converts throughout their post-conversion journey.

More broadly, the findings demonstrate that effective support for converts requires an integrated approach that combines religious education, emotional encouragement, and community engagement. By addressing these dimensions simultaneously, Muslim communities can facilitate deeper Qur'anic engagement and contribute to the long-term religious development of converts, particularly in rural and underserved regions.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that learning the Qur'an constitutes a central component of the post-conversion experiences of Muslim converts in Padang Raya Village, North Luwu Regency. Conversion to Islam was not perceived as the final stage of a religious journey but rather as the beginning of a continuous process of learning, adaptation, and spiritual development. Within this process, the Qur'an emerged as the primary source through which converts sought to understand Islamic teachings, strengthen their faith, and cultivate religious commitment.

The findings reveal that religious motivation for learning the Qur'an was shaped by both external and internal factors. Family support, particularly from spouses, played a significant role in introducing converts to Qur'anic learning and encouraging their participation in religious activities. However, sustained engagement with the Qur'an gradually generated personal motivation rooted in spiritual experiences and a growing appreciation of the Qur'an's guidance. Through reading, recitation, and reflection, converts developed stronger emotional and spiritual connections with the Qur'an, perceiving it as a source of peace, comfort, moral direction, and religious reassurance.

The study further highlights that Qur'anic engagement among converts extends beyond the acquisition of recitation skills. It represents a broader process of religious learning through which converts internalize Islamic values and deepen their understanding of their new faith. Despite the geographical limitations and restricted access to formal religious education in rural areas, the participants demonstrated remarkable enthusiasm for learning the Qur'an and welcomed opportunities for religious guidance whenever such opportunities became available.

These findings suggest that effective support for Muslim converts should prioritize accessible and sustainable Qur'anic education programs that address not only cognitive aspects of learning but also the spiritual and emotional needs of new Muslims. Strengthening community-based religious education, mentoring initiatives, and Qur'anic literacy programs may contribute significantly to fostering long-term religious commitment among converts, particularly in geographically remote and underserved communities. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing scholarship on conversion and Qur'anic

engagement by demonstrating how interaction with the Qur'an functions as a meaningful pathway for sustaining faith and religious development among Muslim converts in rural Indonesia.

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